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# COUNTRY RETREAT

For this empty-nester refresh, designer Rajni Alex transformed a once-busy home into a clutter-free space primed for entertaining.

**BY MARY KATE HOGAN**  
PHOTOS BY ADAM KANE MACCHIA



## When kids head off to college, it's a major transition for any family.

These homeowners also viewed it as the perfect time to reinvent and renovate their home. Designer Rajni Alex agreed, explaining, "Renovations always involve some level of discomfort. With the kids out of the house, we could get creative and go big." Alex already understood her clients' tastes and tolerance for disruption, having completed a design project for them in White Plains. Now, for the couple's modified ranch, set on sprawling land in Katonah, the focus was on opening up the space to create a light, bright kitchen, ensuring that the kitchen and connected family room, dining room, and bar/pantry functioned smoothly for day-to-day cooking and entertaining.

### Musical Rooms

The first order of business for Alex and her team — Jessica Gallardo, senior designer, and Ashley Tortorella, junior designer — was to persuade the clients to swap certain rooms. She recommended moving the kitchen into the family room and the dining room into the former living room; both rooms would then connect to the outdoor kitchen and serve as an entertaining zone. "We turned their world upside down — in a good way," says Alex, who notes that the new kitchen takes advantage of walls of windows overlooking the lush, natural grounds. "People spend the most amount of time in the kitchen these days," she says. "And now, they have the most fabulous view of the garden and pool."

To preserve that vista and take advantage of the tall ceilings, Alex skipped the upper cabinetry and instead planned for



well-organized lowers and one floor-to-ceiling storage piece. Roomy backless stools were tucked under the massive kitchen island to minimize visual clutter. At the center of the renovated first floor, the team created a pantry/bar that connects to the kitchen, dining room, and family room. The pantry houses serving dishes and entertaining supplies, as well as a wine cooler, beverage center, built-in ice maker, small dishwasher, and pull-out trays. The chic pantry/bar also acts as a place for guests to linger over drinks and socialize at the family's annual Christmas party and other gatherings.







## Taking Root(s)

Once the couple agreed to the floor plans, which they loved, they gave the design team free rein to select color and décor. “They completely trusted our vision, and we immersed ourselves in understanding their needs,” says Alex. Both homeowners are Irish, and the designers wanted to give a subtle nod to their heritage and the natural surroundings without being too literal, keeping things fresh and modern. Elements that reference their background include wood tones, rich dark green and blue paint, a plaid ottoman, and warm caramel-colored fabric for the chairs. Wooden beams above lend a slightly rustic feel, while Waterworks faucets in unlacquered brass add to the warmth of the kitchen.

## Sense of Place

As a workspace for two dedicated cooks, this kitchen is not only beautiful but also planned to a T. “I have this OCD about having a home for everything,” says Alex. “A lot of thought process goes into organization.” She met with the client many times to review details, such as where they would house cutting boards, knives, oils, paper towels, and teas (she’s a big tea drinker). Inside the cabinetry, custom-built by Jem Woodworking, Alex dedicated a space for everything, including plates stored close to the dishwasher and a plumbed-in Miele coffee bar. Near the sink, slits were cut into the soapstone surface to let water drain from any hand-washed dishes — no need for a drying rack. “I love a kitchen with minimal visible clutter, everything tucked away,” says Alex. And so do her clients. “They are very happy. We didn’t spare any details.” **WH**